



From: SERMONS & ART OF LAURA GENTRY <http://pastorgentry.blogspot.com/2007/01/set-captives-free.html>

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Miracles I / Acts of Wonder

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WORSHIP GUIDE

Before you begin your time of worship, find a comfortable place to be and gather whatever you might need: your Bible, candles, something to write on and with, your computer/connected device (if you intend to listen to music online), etc. Feel free to adapt this worship guide in any way that makes best sense to you and those you might be gathered with. (Consider inviting someone – a friend, a family member – to worship with you.) Commit to spending the next hour with God.

PRELUDE - Listen and sing along to a song or hymn that blesses and centers your spirit!

WELCOME – *adapted from <http://www.freshworship.org/>*

Lord God, You spoke into darkness and chaos and then there was light;
You imagined this earth in its complexity and beauty and called it into being
You created humanity in your own image and gave us a home to live in
We believe you can do miracles

But even if you don't, you are still God

Lord God, You walked with Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego through the fiery furnace
You shut the mouths of hungry lions and kept Daniel safe until morning
You gave Hannah a family when she despaired of ever having a child
We believe you can do miracles

But even if you don't, you are still God

Lord God, You changed water into wine so the wedding party could continue
You calmed a storm and your disciples with words of quiet authority
You transformed a boy's picnic into a meal for a multitude
with plenty left over

We believe you can do miracles

But even if you don't, you are still God

Lord God, You healed a woman from 12 years of bleeding and rejection
You asked Bartimaeus what he wanted and then restored his sight
You watched a paralysed man being lowered through the roof
and helped him to his feet

We believe you can do miracles

But even if you don't, you are still God

Lord God, You called Lazarus from the tomb and restored him to life
You walked past the mourners at Jairus' house
and gave his daughter back to him
You suffered a horrendous crucifixion
in order to defeat sin and death and give us life
We believe you can do miracles

But even if you don't, you are still God

Lord God, You told your disciples that they would do greater things than you had done
We hear and read stories of miracles in our world—of you healing the sick,
setting prisoners free, releasing drug addicts from their addiction,
providing the right amount of money at just the right time
We believe you can do miracles

But even if you don't, you are still God.

OPENING PRAYER -

God of our wholeness and of our hope,
We gather in awe of the miracles - the acts of wonder - that have come through your hand.
We are witnesses to them through our faith ancestors and, yes, even in our own lives.
We gather in gratitude that you desire the fullness of life for each of us, that you see and know
what we each need, and that you are actively at work in and among us bringing about healing
and wholeness.
We believe you can do miracles, loving God, yet miracles don't always happen, and so our
faith is mixed with doubt and our trust is accompanied by questions.
Meet us as we embark on this new worship series, as we seek to know you better, to
understand more of your ways, and to open ourselves without reservation to become conduits
of your healing and love - of your miracles - in the world.
We believe you can do miracles, God, but even if you don't, you are still God. **Amen.**

OPENING HYMN - Make Us Holy, Make Us Whole, URW 160

Listen here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FMjfhRgzdxI>

In your love, make us whole
May we rest in your compassion
On the long, weary stroll,
In the warmth of your love,
may your peace fill our hearts

May we know the love of Jesus.
By your grace, you console,
make us holy, make us whole.

SCRIPTURE - Luke 4:16-21

¹⁶ When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read,¹⁷ and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

¹⁸ “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor.

He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free,

¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

²⁰ And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. ²¹ Then he began to say to them, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”

This is the Word of God for the People of God. **Thanks be to God!**

LISTEN - Healing, as I mentioned in my weekly email, was a central concern for my mother. It was so, so important to her. Not just for herself, but for everyone else also. One of the most touching and moving things about my week in Chicago following my mother’s death was meeting the people who were a part of her daily life and her community. It seemed like everyone, and I mean everyone - from the receptionist at the big, beautiful Presybeterian church, to the neighbors in her building, from the women that she gathered with each week for prayer, to her financial advisor, from the many random members of her congregation to friends who had known her for decades, everyone had a story about how my mother prayed for them, prayed for their healing, prayed for healing to flow through their lives. Some were ordinary in their faithful accompaniment, but some were downright fantastical, miraculous, if you would, in the way things came together, found resolution, or were physically healed.

My mother carried deep wounds from her childhood, and later, from her marriage. These seemed to haunt her and follow her all of her life. But somewhere along the way, she encountered the deep and abiding love of God, not as a concept that she read in the Bible, sung in hymns, and knew in her mind, but in a powerful, real, and transformative way. She depended on that love. God’s love anchored her, kept her tethered to the present moment and to her true identity as a beloved child of God. God’s love nourished her in ways no other love or relationship could. She trusted God. God had never lied to her, betrayed her, got tired of her, or abandoned her. God’s love gave her peace in the face of her oftentimes chaotic and dark thoughts, purpose when she felt

lost, and clear direction and guidance as she navigated through the ups and many downs of her life. And God's love healed her. Not just once, but again and again and again.

Today, we begin a new worship series that invites each of us to step fully into the possibility of God's healing, God's amazing and transformative love - for us and for each other. What does that mean to you? Where does that strike you and your life? In what ways are you in need, desiring, hoping for healing...right now? Maybe it's physical. Maybe it's emotional. Maybe it's relational. Maybe it's a recent thing or maybe it's an old, dogged thing. Maybe you're aware of it and maybe you're not. Maybe there's one thing or a million things. And maybe it's all complicated and a little bit of everything. I invite you to bring it all - the whole of it - before God and to this worship series. I invite you to seek God and God's healing like never before, and be open to the ordinary or wondrous ways God will show up. I invite you to be courageous and unabashed in your prayer and your seeking. For I believe - I trust, like my mother - that God's love is real, is powerful, and is transformative, and that it is at work in our lives and in the world.

Our passage from the Gospel according to Luke is one of my favorites. It comes early in the stories of Jesus, right after those important 40 days and 40 nights in the wilderness (at least in Luke), and, in my mind, sets the tone of everything that comes afterwards. I hear it as Jesus declaring and claiming his mission. Do you?

Luke tells us that following his time in the wilderness that Jesus is "filled with the power of the Spirit" and returns to Galilee, the region in and around Nazareth, his hometown, teaching in the synagogues along the way. He is met with praise and excitement in each place. And then he comes to Nazareth and does the same thing. He goes to the synagogue on the sabbath, stands up to read, and is given the scroll, the scriptures. The reading comes from the prophet Isaiah, the prophet you and I might be the most familiar with because he is read every Advent season in our churches. And this is what Jesus reads: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of the sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

It's a powerful piece of scripture, isn't it? Isaiah was there telling God's people what he had been called to do, what his mission was all about. God was clearly concerned about the last and the least in Isaiah's world - the poor, the captives, the blind, the oppressed, those bound up by debt. This call was making clear to God's people that the prophet's call was to bring change, to up-end what had become twisted and broken, to make way for freedom and for liberation. Put simply, it was to bring healing and wholeness.

But then something very important happens. Jesus doesn't just simply read the scripture. Luke tells us that Jesus finishes reading, rolls the scroll back up, hands it to the attendant, and sits down. All eyes are on him. What's he going to say? How is he going to illuminate this scripture? I imagine Jesus taking a moment, looking around the room, maybe clearing his throat. And then quietly but utterly clearly saying, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." It's a mic drop moment, isn't it? With those 9 words, Jesus not only claims the prophet's call as his own, but he claims that in him, the call is fulfilled, made complete, present. It is as if he is saying, "God's healing and wholeness is fulfilled in me and through me."

And that's what we witness in the rest of the gospel, isn't it? That in Jesus' every move, every act, every word, he is bringing healing and wholeness into fulfillment. And it's healing and wholeness at every level, isn't it? Jesus offers physical healing, yes, the blind do see, those bent over are straightened, and the sick do become well. But the healing also goes much deeper. The author of "Miracle: When Christ Touches Our Deepest Need", Flora Slosson Wuellner writes, "[A]s we reflect on [Jesus'] acts of wonder, we see that far more than bodily healing was involved." In fact, she suggests that there are at least 6 levels of meaning in each of the miracles and that these "deeper meanings of the miracles will transform our lives."

And what are the deeper meanings of Jesus' healing stories? In and through these stories, (1) we get to see who God is and what God is all about, (2) how every person matters to God, is unique, precious, and beloved. In the stories, (3) we recognize God's longing not just for us as individuals, but for us as communities, as collective bodies. And (4) that God cares about, is concerned with our here and now, with our earthly life, our earthly needs, our bodies and our relationships. We also see that (5) "God's healing and transformation involves the whole person", our heart, mind, spirit, body, relationship, and choices. Wuellner writes, "God's loving power longs to enfold and flood through all that we are - our subconscious as well as conscious selves; our wounded memories, our damaged trust; our fears; our shadow sides; our hidden hopes; the deep gifts within us not yet born or long forgotten; our attitudes towards ourselves, others, the world around us, and God. Perhaps the greatest act of wonder is that as we are healed, made whole, and filled with God, we become more our unique selves, not less." (p. 15-16). And finally, (6) these stories have "direct meaning and significance for each of us in our daily lives." They are rich 2,000 year old stories that can and will make a difference to us now.

So, Friends, are you willing to dive in, are you ready to do so? Are you willing and ready to step into the healing stories of Jesus and invite God to work healing, work miracles in your life? Are you willing and ready to encounter God anew - allow God to move from the pages of the Bible, the words of a hymn, the trite things that we say to each other - into the fullness, the realness, the here and now of our lives? And are you willing and ready to pass it on, to be conduits, like Jesus,

of God's great love and transformative healing to others? It is my prayer that this worship series will meet you - meet you in your deepest need - and that you, like my mother, will find God's love and healing becoming your all in all. Amen.

SONG OF MEDITATION - God of Miracles

Watch and listen here: <https://youtu.be/sG1RSgjxmpg>

PRAYERS of the PEOPLE – *Spend time in prayer. What did you hear for yourself through today's scripture and reflection? Talk to God about it. Then lift up the joys and concerns that are in your heart. You might write them down, speak them aloud, or pray them in silence.*

We would be honored to pray with you and for you.

Please send a note via text, mail, or email or give a call to our Healing Prayer Team.

SHARING OUR GIFTS– *How might you offer yourself and all that you have to God this week? How are you being invited to practice generosity? Spend a moment listening for God's direction.*

You are invited to contribute financially towards the purpose and ministry of TTUMC. We are a congregation committed to being conduits of God's healing in our neighborhood and beyond, and in so doing, impact the last and the least. You can contribute by mailing in a check, dropping off cash, or giving online via PayPal (visit www.twintowersumc.org). Take a moment and do that now.

CLOSING HYMN - "There's No One in This World Like Jesus (Hakuna Wakaita sa Jesu)",
W&S 3036

Listen here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ky-AcUVA6mY>

There's no one in this world like Jesus,
there's no one in this world like him;
There's no one in this world like Jesus,
there's no one like him.

I'm running, running
Searching, searching,
I'm turning, turning,

Searching, searching,
Searching, searching, everywhere.
There's no one, there's no one like him.

Hakuna wakaita sa Jesu,
hakuna waikaita saye;
hakuna wakaita sa Jesu,
haku, hakuchina

BENEDICTION - *(Adapted from Rev. Michelle L. Torigian)*

As we enter a world where miracles are possible,
Nudge us forward when the unknown is overwhelming.
Empower us when anxiety and amazement seize our spirits.
Allow our trembling voices to share hope with a hurting world.
Open our hearts to our neighbors yearning for healing.
And allow us to see your hand at work in each season of our lives. Amen.

NOW GO AND PASS CHRIST'S PEACE!

NEXT WEEK'S SCRIPTURE: Mark 10:46-51

As we prepare our hearts, spirits, and minds for worship, please note:

- **New Worship Series is here!** As a congregation committed to being conduits of God's healing in our neighborhood and beyond, we are going to dive deeply and intentionally into the healing stories of the Gospels in the coming season. We seek powerful healing for ourselves and a strengthening of our ability to be conduits of God's healing to others in meaningful and practical ways. I hope you are as excited and inspired as I am to start this series. Please consider who in your family and community might be longing for a word of healing...and invite them to worship with you! Here are a few ways you can intentionally engage and grow through this worship series:
 - **Read and reflect** - you are strongly encouraged to purchase your own copy of **Miracle: When Jesus Touches Our Deepest Need** (Flora Slosson Wuellner) from your favorite local or online bookstore. [You can order a copy through Bookshop.org or upperroom.org. I also have 5 copies available in my office! Just holler!]
 - **Keep a healing prayer journal** through the series - use the journal to take notes each week in worship, reflect on your reading, and to write notes to God.
 - **Join the weekly "Go Deeper" conversation** on Thursdays at 7:00 p.m. (Please email office for Zoom link) - Gather with others for a time of sharing, prayer, and mutual encouragement in opening ourselves to God's presence and healing.
- **Giving Thanks, Blessing Forward** - The Graham Family (Bonnie, Joe, Luke, and Shirley) will be moving to Miami at the end of June. They have been an amazing part of our community over the last 3 years, anchoring much of what has happened in our children's Sunday School, and inspiring our Kids Sing experiment. We are incredibly grateful for this time together! You are invited to come and give thanks and bless them forward in a casual outdoor gathering, Sunday, June 13th between 3:30 - 5:30 p.m. at Krusi Park. Please RSVP [here](#) and bring a dish to share!